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# South-South and triangular cooperation in the United Nations system

## Note by the Secretary-General

The Secretary-General has the honour to transmit to the members of the General Assembly his comments and those of the United Nations System Chief Executives Board for Coordination on the report of the Joint Inspection Unit entitled "South-South and triangular cooperation in the United Nations system" (JIU/REP/2011/3).

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*Summary*

The report of the Joint Inspection Unit entitled "South-South and triangular cooperation in the United Nations system" seeks to assess and make recommendations on the ways and means of enhancing system-wide contribution to South-South and triangular cooperation, addressing issues of mandates, frameworks and policies, intergovernmental processes, structures, financing and coordination.

The present note presents the views of United Nations system organizations on the recommendations provided in the report. The views of the United Nations system have been consolidated on the basis of inputs provided by member organizations of the United Nations System Chief Executives Board for Coordination, which welcomed the report, generally supported its recommendations and noted that it underscored the importance that organizations of the United Nations system attached to South-South and triangular cooperation.

# I. Introduction

1. The report of the Joint Inspection Unit entitled "South-South and triangular cooperation in the United Nations system" (A/66/717) seeks to review the existing United Nations institutional arrangements in support of South-South and triangular cooperation, and to make recommendations aimed at facilitating the preparation by the Secretary-General of a specific framework of operational guidelines for relevant United Nations organizations and agencies, in accordance with their respective mandates, for the implementation of the Nairobi outcome document of the High-level United Nations Conference on South-South Cooperation, held in Nairobi from 1 to 3 December 2009, and endorsed by the General Assembly in its resolution 64/222. In doing so, the report assesses the current situation in respect of South-South and triangular cooperation and makes recommendations on the ways and means of enhancing system-wide contribution to South-South and triangular cooperation, addressing issues of mandates, frameworks and policies, intergovernmental processes, structures, financing and coordination.

# II. General comments

2. Organizations of the United Nations system welcomed the report of the Joint Inspection Unit on South-South and triangular cooperation in the United Nations system. They noted that issues presented in the report had been considered by the General Assembly in its resolution 62/208, pursuant to its 2007 mandated review of operational activities aimed at mainstreaming South-South cooperation in the work of the United Nations, and were at the core of the work of relevant actors in the United Nations system. Agencies were generally supportive of the recommendations of the report and found that the report was relevant to, and would be helpful in, improving South-South cooperation through the work of the United Nations system.

3. Agencies agreed on the importance of tracking, monitoring and evaluating, and mainstreaming activities on South-South cooperation in the United Nations Development Assistance Framework process at the national level. They noted that, while this approach had its value, it needed to be demand-driven and implemented in accordance with national priorities. Similarly, agencies generally agreed on the implementation of South-South cooperation at the regional and subregional levels through regional coordination arrangements.

4. Agencies were appreciative of the efforts of the Joint Inspection Unit to thoroughly examine the institutions and mechanisms providing support for South-South cooperation within the United Nations system. They noted that the report offered some new perspectives on the operation and guidance of South-South practices, although there were some areas where divergences arose between agencies of the United Nations system and the report. Agencies found that the report tended to focus more on shortcomings within the United Nations system than on uncovering and highlighting best practices and lessons learned. In its assessment of existing institutional arrangements, the report identified a number of structural and procedural deficiencies which required improvement; however, agencies indicated that the report could have been strengthened through the provision of a more detailed and supportive analysis of how the United Nations system could best scale up its work in the area of South-South cooperation and in such a way as to be responsive to country needs and meaningful to both providers and receivers of

South-South cooperation. Further, agencies felt the report would have benefited from including additional information on best practices and the lessons learned from past practice in South-South cooperation.

5. Agencies indicated that the report did not provide sufficient assessment of or recommend a clear course of action for "communicating" South-South cooperation at the inter-agency level, among Member States and to stakeholders and external audiences. They noted that the lack of a comprehensive system-wide communication and engagement strategy undermined the programme and its potential to attain full impact. Successful public communication of South-South and triangular cooperation required clear definitions of both concepts and their applications, which were currently lacking, as noted in the report. Agencies further noted the need to better communicate the achievements and benefits of South-South cooperation, internally, externally and at the inter-agency level, and the need to target resources for this purpose, in line with institutional structures or programmatic plans.

6. The findings showed that South-South cooperation had been diffused throughout the United Nations system, although the report noted areas for improvement focusing primarily on structural fixes. While there was always room for improvement, agencies noted that South-South cooperation was embedded in the processes and procedures of the United Nations system as a whole, in terms of staffing, procurement, knowledge-sharing and relationship-building, particularly in light of intergovernmental oversight. The technical assistance activities that had long been associated with South-South cooperation were indeed significant contributions to South-South and triangular cooperation, although the report preferred to disaggregate these actions.

7. Agencies appreciated that the report gave detailed consideration to relations between the Special Unit for South-South Cooperation and the United Nations Development Programme (UNDP). Agencies recognized that this is an administrative matter that UNDP and the High-level Committee on South-South Cooperation must work together to address within the upcoming Fifth Cooperation Framework on South-South Cooperation, keeping in mind existing management structures and reporting lines.

8. As noted in the report, numerous governing bodies of agencies of the United Nations system had emphasized the inclusion of South-South cooperation both in policies and in processes; but as the modes of South-South cooperation continued to expand among developing countries, the United Nations system was working towards improving its responsiveness to an increased demand. As a result, more and more agencies were establishing their own policies, structures and units for managing their own South-South cooperation programmes and activities. Furthermore, those actions were endorsed within the context of the Revised Guidelines for the Review of Policies and Procedures concerning Technical Cooperation among Developing Countries (TCDC/13/3), set forth in 2003, and are necessarily broad in scope in order to allow for customization by individual agencies of their activities and policies on South-South cooperation in light of their individual mandates. As agencies put in place policy frameworks for South-South cooperation, the system was moving forward towards greater coherence and effectiveness of South-South cooperation. In this regard, the Special Unit for South-South Cooperation has played a supportive role in responding to agencies' needs for assistance on South-South cooperation, which are often triggered by a request from Member States or those

agencies' own governing bodies, underscoring the essential principle of South-South cooperation, namely, that it should be driven by the demands of developing countries, with the United Nations system playing a supporting role.

## III. Specific comments on recommendations

**Recommendation 1**

**The High-level Committee on South-South Cooperation should request the Administrator of the United Nations Development Programme, as Chair of the United Nations Development Group, to mandate the Special Unit for South-South Cooperation, in coordination with United Nations system entities, including the regional commissions, to propose operational definitions of South-South and triangular cooperation, submit them to the General Assembly for approval, through the High-level Committee at its seventeenth session in 2012, and ensure their dissemination and application, including through workshops and training sessions at Headquarters and at the field level system-wide.**

9. Agencies of the United Nations system agreed that operational definitions of South-South and triangular cooperation are crucial and expressed their support for the urgent need to update the definitions. Agencies noted that this would go further towards strengthening coherence of understanding and approach with respect to South-South and triangular cooperation. While the concept of South-South and triangular cooperation was well understood by agencies, they noted that the Special Unit for South-South Cooperation was urged to organize trainings and prepare awareness-raising material which would assist in achieving system-wide understanding of the concept.

**Recommendation 2**

**The UNDP Administrator, as Chair of the United Nations Development Group, should request the Special Unit on South-South Cooperation, in coordination with United Nations system entities, including the regional commissions, and through the United Nations Development Group/United Nations Development Operations Coordination Office, to develop a common framework and strategy, policies and operational guidelines to support mainstreaming of South-South and triangular cooperation and knowledge-sharing through relevant programmes and projects at Headquarters, regional and country levels, to be adapted by the organizations to their respective areas of competence, for submission through the High-level Committee on South-South Cooperation to the Economic and Social Council and the General Assembly for approval, with a view to their dissemination and application, including through workshops and training sessions, not later than the end of 2012. All relevant Headquarters programmes, the United Nations Development Assistance Framework and technical cooperation projects should contain a South-South cooperation component, at the request of Governments, as appropriate.**

10. Agencies noted that the High-level Committee on South-South Cooperation had already requested the development of a set of operational guidelines on South-South cooperation. Organizations of the United Nations system were also working on their own policies and strategies with individual governing bodies, with a view to determining the appropriate frameworks for South-South and triangular cooperation, which would then enable agencies to consider how best to support these

frameworks, policies and strategies. Agencies generally supported the inclusion of South-South cooperation components in programmes, projects and frameworks of the United Nations system and further noted that the United Nations Development Assistance Frameworks were instruments that ultimately reflected the national priorities of Member States. Organizations of the United Nations system expressed their support for sharing lessons learned and best practices in the development of a common framework and strategy, policies and operational guidelines for mainstreaming South-South and triangular cooperation. However, they also noted the need to take into account agency-specific mandates and priorities, as set by their relevant governing boards.

**Recommendation 3**

**The legislative bodies of United Nations system organizations should request the Executive Heads to establish identifiable and dedicated structures, mechanisms and focal points tasked with developing an agency-specific corporate policy and support strategy, and ensure coordination on South-South and triangular cooperation within their respective organizations and on an inter-agency level, through the reallocation of the necessary staff and resources for this purpose, as appropriate.**

11. Organizations of the United Nations system welcomed recommendation 3, noting that the creation of structures within United Nations agencies to manage activities relevant to South-South cooperation had been affirmed through the Revised Guidelines on South-South cooperation. Agencies shared the view that the full potential of programmes on South-South cooperation had not been captured, given the lack of clear legislative mandates for South-South cooperation supported by robust frameworks. Agencies firmly supported the institutionalization of promotional activities on South-South and triangular cooperation within the United Nations system and noted that structures, mechanisms and focal points were present in some agencies within existing technical cooperation programmes.

**Recommendation 4**

**The High-level Committee on South-South Cooperation should request the Secretary-General to submit to the General Assembly, no later than the end of 2012, a proposal to review the current South-South cooperation governance structure and its secretariat support within the United Nations, so as to ensure more efficient and effective work procedures for the High-level Committee, and better delineation of responsibilities and interaction among all stakeholders. The proposal should address: (a) the need for greater participation by technical cooperation agencies, related national authorities and focal points in the work of the High-level Committee; (b) the need for a regular thematic agenda, discussion and action, based on the work of standing thematic groups composed of national authorities, academia, civil society and the private sector, as appropriate; and (c) the consideration of thematic and sectoral reports by relevant United Nations system organizations.**

12. Agencies welcomed recommendation 4, which was aimed at ensuring the efficient functioning of the High-level Committee on South-South Cooperation. They noted, however, that the implementation of this recommendation should be driven by the Committee itself, taking into account the structural, procedural, financial, operational and other implications of proposals to Member States.

Furthermore, agencies noted that the merits of recommendation 4 ought to be weighed with two considerations in mind. First, it should be recognized that, as South-South cooperation now involved more actors in government, civil society, academia and the private sector, a more inclusive High-level Committee on South-South Cooperation might be an ideal means of giving voice to these various actors. Second, with the Administrator of UNDP acting as the convener of the High-level Committee on South-South Cooperation, more participatory sessions of the Committee could be beneficial to the United Nations system; but as this would also involve a more complex process in terms of institutional arrangements, servicing protocol and financing, a detailed analysis, including a critical cost/benefit analysis, was therefore necessary.

**Recommendation 5**

**The High-level Committee on South-South Cooperation should: (a) request the Special Unit for South-South Cooperation to continue implementing its mandate and responsibilities as assigned pursuant to the Buenos Aires Plan of Action for Promoting and Implementing Technical Cooperation among Developing Countries, the recommendations contained in the report on new directions for technical cooperation among developing countries, and the Nairobi outcome document of the High-level United Nations Conference on South-South Cooperation, focusing on global and United Nations system policy support and advocacy; inter-agency coordination and facilitation; catalysing innovative mechanisms; fostering inclusive partnerships and mobilizing resources from both public and private entities to support multi-agency initiatives in implementing the Nairobi outcome document; and supporting knowledge-sharing, networking and exchange of best practices, including through new and existing centres of excellence, the Special Unit and United Nations system platforms. To that effect, the Special Unit should review its current portfolio of activities and staffing profile with a view to prioritizing activities while ensuring better delineation of responsibilities with other United Nations entities; and (b) call on all relevant United Nations system organizations to support the work of the Special Unit and leverage the services that it offers.**

13. Organizations of the United Nations system support and welcome this recommendation, which they note is directed at legislative bodies. The recommendation to review activities and staffing is in line with the numerous mandates of the Special Unit for South-South Cooperation and agencies were keen to continue to support and leverage the work of the Special Unit.

**Recommendation 6**

**The High-level Committee on South-South Cooperation and the Economic and Social Council, in coordination with the United Nations Development Programme (UNDP), should consider relocating the regional representatives of the Special Unit for South-South Cooperation to the regional commissions, with direct reporting to UNDP and the Special Unit.**

14. Recommendation 6 is aimed at the achievement of a more coherent approach to promoting South-South cooperation at the regional level, leveraging the knowledge, processes and linkages of the regional commissions and the complementarity of their work to that of the United Nations system. However, the relocation of regional representatives of the Special Unit for South-South

Cooperation has considerable financial, technical, operational and programmatic implications and requires further reflection, particularly with regard to the entities directly concerned. Agencies would like to highlight the fact that the relocation of the Special Unit for South-South Cooperation away from the regional service centres of the United Nations Development Programme would deprive the organization of the human resources each agency needs in order to provide more direct support to South-South regional initiatives, as called for by the Nairobi outcome document of the High-level United Nations Conference on South-South Cooperation, held in 2009. Several agencies indicated the need for further clarity concerning the role of, and reporting lines for, the proposed relocation.

**Recommendation 7**

**The High-level Committee on South-South Cooperation should provide further clarification on the reporting lines of the Special Unit for South-South Cooperation, with a view to reconciling the issue of its separate identity within the United Nations Development Programme (UNDP) and effecting closer integration of the Unit within the UNDP structure, including through requesting the Administrator of UNDP to establish collaborative working arrangements at Headquarters and in the regions, and the regular participation of the Unit's head and regional coordinators in all strategic and decision-making mechanisms and meetings, so as to enhance the profile and visibility of the Unit and to ensure that South-South cooperation is identified as a cross-cutting issue in all programmatic decisions at corporate and system-wide levels.**

15. While agencies recognized the prerogative of the High-level Committee on South-South Cooperation, they noted that the Committee's work does impact the workplan and agenda of the Special Unit for South-South Cooperation, but that the decision on the Unit's programme of work rests with the Executive Board of the United Nations Development Programme, the United Nations Population Fund and the United Nations Office for Project Services.

**Recommendation 8**

**The Economic and Social Council should request the regional commissions to set up strategies and structures/mechanisms, and mobilize or reallocate resources at the legislative, programmatic and operational levels dedicated to enhancing subregional, regional and interregional South-South cooperation, and to use the annual meetings of the regional coordination mechanisms as a tool for advancing system-wide cooperation and coordination in support of South-South cooperation.**

16. Agencies generally supported recommendation 8 on the increased involvement of the regional commissions in promoting South-South cooperation. However, they noted that recommendation 8 should take into account existing initiatives aimed at enhancing subregional, regional and interregional South-South cooperation, the comparative advantage of the regional commissions, and other regional initiatives, and the mandate of the regional coordination mechanisms. Agencies also noted that further steps in this direction should ultimately aim at mainstreaming South-South cooperation into the work programmes of all subprogrammes. The emphasis on the role of the regional coordination mechanisms as an important inter-agency collaboration tool for advancing South-South cooperation at regional and subregional levels was welcomed, in principle.

**Recommendation 9**

**The legislative and governing bodies of the United Nations system organizations should request the Executive Heads to apportion a specific proportion of core budget resources — not less than 0.5 per cent — for the promotion of South-South cooperation in their respective areas of competence, in consultation with programme countries; and to agree with donor countries on using a specific portion of extrabudgetary resources to finance South-South and triangular cooperation initiatives.**

17. Organizations of the United Nations system recognize that budgetary decisions are primarily the province of Member States. Agencies, by and large, supported this recommendation. However, they noted that in the experience of most organizations of the United Nations system, more than 0.5 per cent of technical cooperation funds was apportioned to regional programmes, which was expected to cover, to a large extent, South-South cooperation activities. Some agencies noted that this recommendation should take into account resource allocation mechanisms within individual agencies, which in most cases exceed 0.5 per cent. Agencies added that it was important to note that programming of funds in most agencies are carried out at country level, jointly with national authorities, and/or earmarked by donors. The idea of a central "target" applied to all resources seems to assume a centralized allocation mechanism, rather than a primarily country-based mechanism for programming, including identification of applicable modalities, which is the case for some agencies. Agencies also added that rather than an exogenous percentage or numerical goal of resource allocation for South-South cooperation, there should be an allocation of resources based on planned development results.

**Recommendation 10**

**The UNDP Administrator should request the Special Unit for South-South Cooperation to develop strategies and financing modalities, in consultation with the United Nations Development Group/United Nations Development Operations Coordination Office, United Nations system organizations, the Department of Economic and Social Affairs of the United Nations Secretariat and donor countries, for promoting triangular cooperation, including through partnerships that bring together providers of horizontal development cooperation, traditional donors and the United Nations system organizations in areas of common interest.**

18. Agencies welcomed recommendation 10 and noted that increased promotion of triangular cooperation by all relevant parties was encouraged. They also noted that triangular cooperation was an integral part of the work of the United Nations Development Group and of the regional commissions. It was also included in the work of the regional development teams.

**Recommendation 11**

**The High-level Committee on South-South Cooperation should request the Executive Heads of United Nations system organizations, funds and programmes, including the regional commissions, starting from 2012, to: (a) put in place systems to monitor their South-South and triangular cooperation activities; (b) include in their regular reports to their governing bodies a subsection on their contribution in support of such cooperation; (c) provide inputs to regular reports to the Economic and Social Council, the High-level Committee on South-South Cooperation and the General Assembly, including the Secretary-General's biennial reports to the Assembly; (d) produce thematic reports at the request of the High-level Committee; and (e) conduct periodic evaluations of their South-South and triangular cooperation activities, based on an agreed set of indicators.**

19. Organizations of the United Nations system welcomed increased monitoring of South-South and triangular cooperation activities. They noted, however, that this should be undertaken within already established reporting mechanisms and reporting requirements, which would thereby avert the creation of additional workloads, which, in turn, have financial, organizational and staffing implications, including in respect of the redesign of some already established reporting instruments. Monitoring and evaluation procedures and programmes on South-South and triangular cooperation activities already existed in some agencies, which could provide assistance in this regard. The determination of indicators necessary for the effective monitoring of South-South and triangular cooperation would require significant involvement of the United Nations Development Group, a factor that was not articulated in recommendation 11.

**Recommendation 12**

**The Secretary-General should ensure that, as from 2012: (a) South-South cooperation is built into the agendas of existing coordination arrangements at Headquarters, regional and country levels, in particular the High-level Committee on Programmes/United Nations System Chief Executives Board for Coordination, United Nations Development Group, the Executive Committee on Economic and Social Affairs, the regional coordination mechanisms, the regional director teams and the United Nations country teams; (b) regular meetings of the Special Unit for South-South Cooperation thematic clusters, task forces and focal points are held with agreed terms of reference and programmes of work; (c) South-South cooperation is included in relevant country United Nations Development Assistance Frameworks and new subregional/regional United Nations Development Assistance Frameworks; and (d) the Special Unit is represented in all relevant coordination mechanisms, task forces and thematic clusters, as applicable.**

20. Agencies generally supported recommendation 12, with several noting that increasing the number of mechanisms where South-South cooperation is discussed could be helpful. However, the key factor of how these mechanisms would work together to ensure coherence and consistency of approach had to be considered. While the inclusion of South-South cooperation in the work of the United Nations system at country level through the United Nations Development Assistance Framework was supported, it was noted that this must be determined and driven by national priorities.